



STATE OF IOWA

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DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
CHARLES J. KROGMEIER, DIRECTOR

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Here is a column by Charles Krogmeier, director of the Iowa Department of Human Services, regarding his decision to convert an additional 23 DHS county offices into part-time status. For more information, contact Roger Munns at 515 281 4848

‘Still a DHS Door in Every County’

*By Charles Krogmeier, Director
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Eight years and three predecessors ago, the Iowa Department of Human Services announced a new way of doing business in many rural counties. It was announced that offices in 34 counties would no longer be open fulltime during the business week. Instead, they would be part time, with most of them open by appointment only.

A month ago I announced that 23 additional counties would be added to that list. There are good reasons for the change now just as there were good reasons in 2002. The difference is, we now have experience with part-time offices, and we know they work.

I tell you this because there has been concern in some of the counties that are being converted. Let me address some of those concerns.

We are not closing any office and we are not ending any service or making any of them more difficult to obtain. There will still be a door in every county that says Iowa DHS. The telephone numbers remain the same and you'll always find a human on the other end.

Most of the part-time offices will not have drop-in office hours – instead people will need to make appointments.

Importantly, people who feel the need to visit us in person right away during business hours are not required to visit their home county office. They can visit any nearby county office that is open. If it's an emergency, such as imminent danger for a child, we'll be there right away, 24/7. Our response times in child protective cases are not changing.

I'm sure you know that our caseloads for benefit programs have grown exponentially in recent months because of the sour economy. Our workers have done a fabulous job of keeping up with the job, and I appreciate all the letters of support that I have received about their work.

From the customer's perspective, it's important to note that in most cases, it is no longer necessary to visit the local office in order to apply for benefits. The Internet is accounting for a higher and higher percent of applications. Of course, people uncomfortable with that technology are always welcome to make appointments for personal help.

The main reason we must make these changes is that we must operate our field offices with fewer and fewer people. Hundreds of DHS workers have informed us that they intend to accept the state's incentive to retire early. We know we will not be able to replace most of them. Thus, we need to cluster our remaining workers in places where the need is greatest.

This change in local office structure is the final piece of DHS restructuring and it has probably gotten more attention than everything else. But you should know about other major changes that will help us operate more efficiently.

We have reduced the number of regional offices from eight to five, we have consolidated our leadership from nine divisions to six, we have increased the number of employees that each

manager supervises, and we have consolidated three important services, including a group in Des Moines that will decide whether a complaint of abuse from anywhere in the state should be investigated in person.

There will be rough edges as we move ahead in this transition, but I'm confident that our performance will improve in the long run.